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ABSTRACT

This study used the National Association for the Education of Young Children's (NAEYC) "Developmentally Appropriate Practices" (1987) guidelines to determine continuity across the primary grades with regard to developmentally appropriate practices (DAPs). It also sought to determine if there was a significant relationship among administrators, teachers, and parents with regard to their respective perceptions of the implementation of DAPs and their preferences for DAPs. A group of early childhood primary school administrators, early childhood primary teachers, and parents were surveyed. The study found that kindergarten teachers were implementing DAPs to a higher degree than other early childhood primary grade teachers. It found a moderate relationship among administrators, teachers, and parents with regard to their respective perceptions of the implementation of DAPs. Regarding preferred practices, there was a moderate relationship between administrators and teachers and a substantial relationship between administrators and parents and teachers and parents. The study also identified a gap between actual practice and preferred practice among teachers and administrators. Contains seven references. (MDM)

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Determining Continuity in the Primary Grades With Regard to Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Practices

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Determining Continuity in the Primary Grades
With Regard to Developmentally Appropriate Teaching Practices

The publication of Developmentally Appropriate Practices (1987) has contributed significantly to increased numbers of child care providers and kindergarten teachers who implement developmentally appropriate practices. However, it appears there has been a lack of continuity of these same practices across the early primary grades. Some primary grade teachers have been more hesitant about moving away from the traditional three reading groups and skill based teaching. Many primary grade teachers have been trying to incorporate the whole language philosophy, integrated thematic teaching, and learning centers, but have lacked the support for achieving complete success. Encouragement and support are important to teachers trying to keep up with change in education. "Many teachers have attempted to make changes within their classrooms only to discover great resistance from parents who do not understand what is happening" (Barbour & Seefeldt, 1993, p.25).

Administrators should also consider The NAEYC Code of Ethical Conduct (Paciorek, & Munro, 1992) as well as several sources of relevant information about children when they make decisions in areas such as enrollment, retention, or placement. This information should be used in adapting curriculum to match the developmental needs of children, including children with special requirements. Administrators should also use this information to communicate with the children's families, and to evaluate

the program's effectiveness (Meisels, 1985). In addition, administrators should support the maintenance of ongoing communication and cooperation between staff at different programs as children and their families make transitions from preschools to kindergarten and on to first grade, etc. Care should be taken to integrate special needs children into the mainstream classroom socially as well as physically. The administrator should avoid isolating special needs children in a segregated classroom or pulling them out of a regular classroom so often as to disrupt continuity and undermine their feeling of belonging to the group (Bredekamp, 1987).

It appears there are still some administrators, supervisors, board members, and parents who are decision makers and partners in education who need to be abreast of developmentally appropriate practices and the importance of developmental continuity across preschool and primary grades. Teachers have a major leadership role not only in guiding children's development and learning but also in designing and implementing arrangements that promote continuity between family and school experiences (Swick, 1991).

Therefore it was the purpose of this study to use the content of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (1987) in determining continuity across the primary grades with regard to developmentally appropriate teaching practices. A second purpose was to determine if there was a significant relationship among administrators, teachers, and parents with regard to: (1) their respective perceptions of the implementation of

developmentally appropriate practices; and (2) their preferences for developmentally appropriate practices. A third purpose was to form a management team of higher education faculty, administration, teachers and parents in developing inservice opportunities for effectively communicating and responding to the needs that were evidenced from the data collection.

Methods

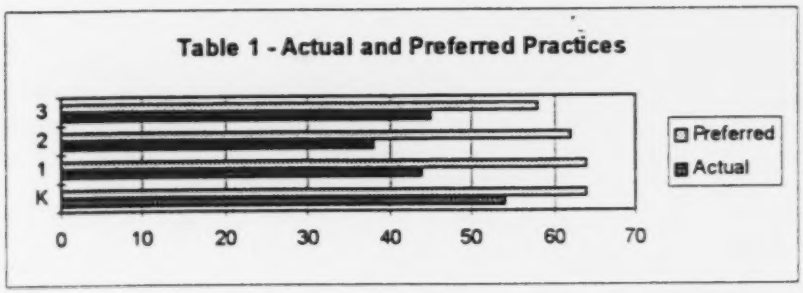
Subjects for the study were LEA administrators, early childhood primary teachers, and parents affiliated with schools in East Tennessee who were willing to participate in the study. Subjects were surveyed related to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (1987). Due to the length of the listing in Developmentally Appropriate Practice, a survey was developed that reflected the major content of the document and was efficient enough that participants would be willing to complete it. It was a modified version of a previously tested survey (Fore, D. & McLeod, 1994). Subjects were provided a dual sided survey response sheet on which the left represented responses of how they perceived their current situation with regard to developmentally appropriate teaching practices (actual practice) and the right represented responses of how they would like for it to be (preferred practice).

The data were analyzed descriptively and a correlation coefficient was used to determine if there was a significant relationship in responses among the administrators, teachers and parents. The data were also analyzed for a comparison between

perceptions of actual practice and preferred practice. In addition, the data collected from teachers were analyzed across grade levels to determine continuity. Survey statements were grouped into the following twelve categories: retention, parent involvement, small group learning, play, guidance, integrated teaching, early childhood training, diversity, grading, standardized testing and motivation. Based on the data collection, a needs assessment for bridging the gap between theory and practice and for establishing continuity across early childhood primary grades was determined. This was and will continue to be used for designing inservice education for area schools by a school management team of higher education faculty, administrators, teachers, and parents.

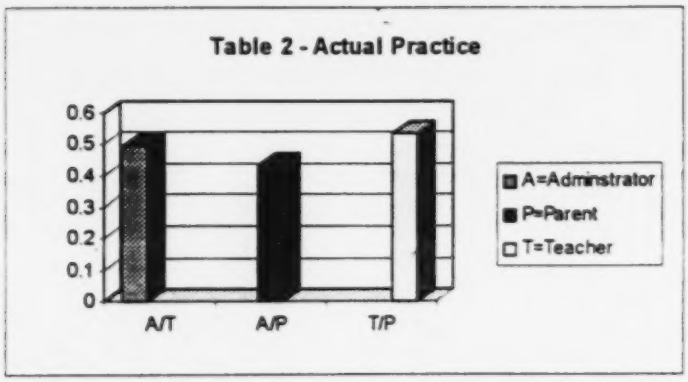
Results

With regard to continuity across the early grades, it was hypothesized that the kindergarten teachers were implementing developmentally appropriate practices to a higher degree than other early childhood primary grade teachers. This proved to be true as noted in Table 1. With respect to preferred practices, it was hypothesized that there would be a decline as the grade level increased. This held true beyond the first grade.



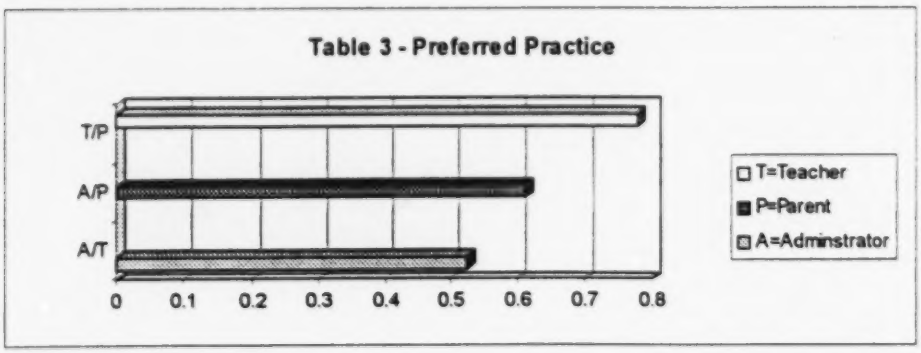
The gap that exists between theory and practice is evidenced in the bar graph shown in Table 1. Some of the teachers admit that they succumb to pressures of testing and accountability to the extent that they forfeit their own desires for developmentally appropriate practices.

A second purpose was to determine if there was a significant relationship among administrators, teachers, and parents with regard to: (1) their respective perceptions of the implementation of developmentally appropriate practices; and (2) their preferences for developmentally appropriate practices. With regard to actual practices, the correlation coefficients were .497 for administrators and teachers, .432 for administrators and parents, and .537 for teachers and parents as shown in Table 2.



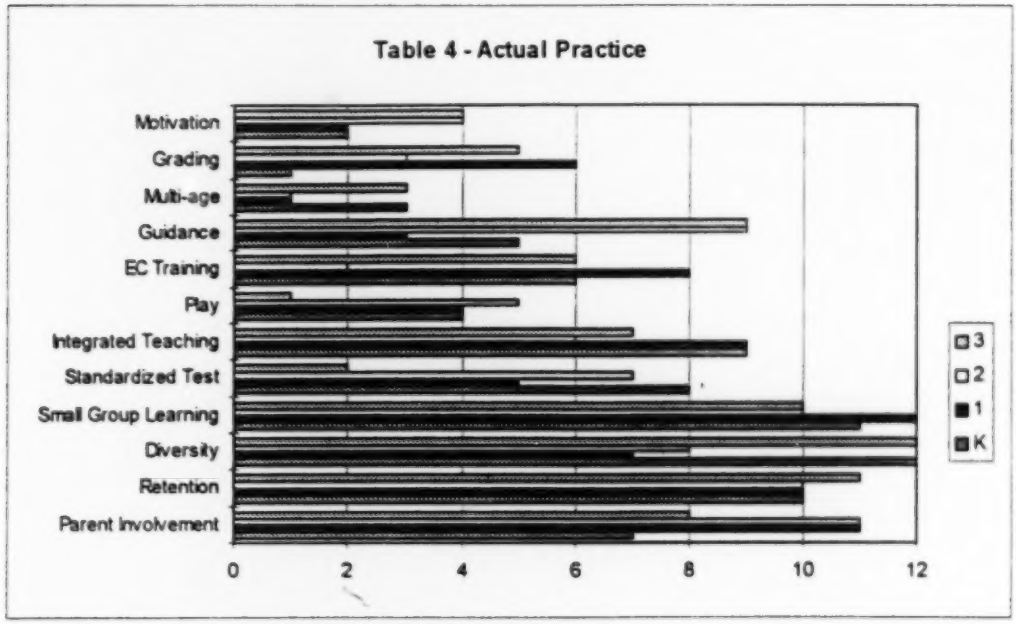
All of these are considered to be moderate relationships (Best & Kahn, 1989).

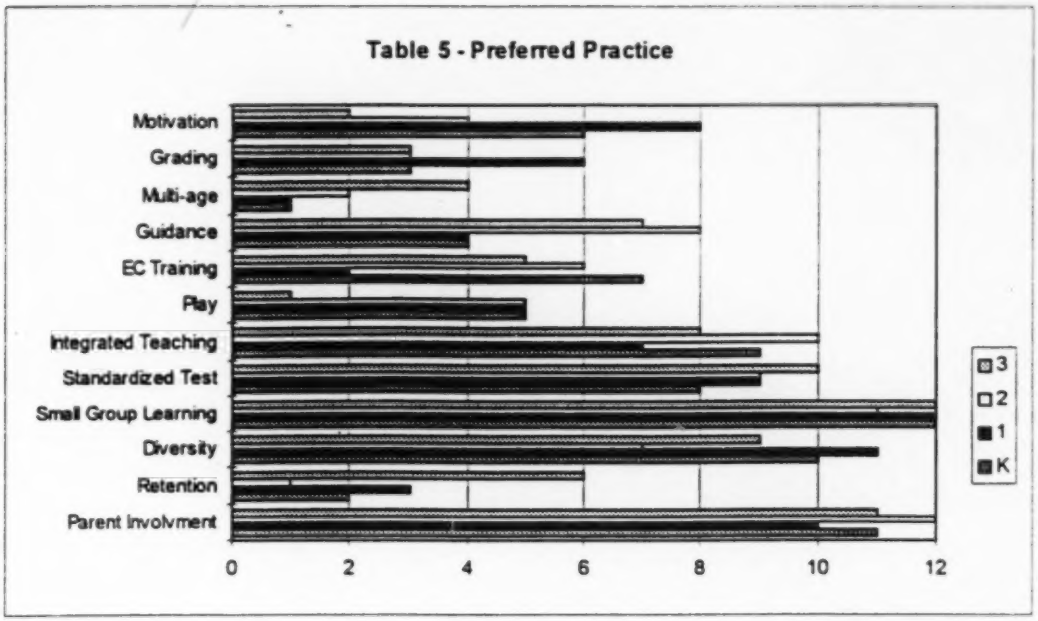
Regarding preferred practices, there was a moderate relationship between administrators & teachers as indicated by the correlation coefficient of .523. There was a substantial relationship between administrators & parents and teachers & parents as indicated by the correlation coefficients of .610 and .777 respectively. These are shown in Table 3.



The statements on the survey were grouped into twelve categories for the purpose of determining possible inservice topics. Table 4 reflects the groupings with regard to actual practice as perceived by kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teachers.

Table 5 reflects the preferred practices of this same group of teachers. It was determined that developmentally appropriate views and practices of motivation, grading, retention, multi-age, and play will be major components of the inservice programming.





Educational or scientific significance of the work

Since the publication of Developmentally Appropriate Practices in 1987, there has been an increased number of child care centers and kindergarten classes that reflect developmentally appropriate practices. However, many children experience a challenging transition when they enter the primary grades. The results of this study support this notion. These children find themselves in classrooms with teachers who use an abundance of workbooks and worksheets in place of learning centers which provide for choice, interest, varying abilities, and manipulatives. Children should not have to adjust to major changes as they move from home to preschool to regular school experiences (Swick, 1991) Therefore, it is significant to provide for

developmental continuity for children who according to Piaget are still in the concrete period of operations. Implications from this study are that administrators, teachers and parents prefer to move toward more developmentally appropriate practices.

The gap between actual practice and preferred practice revealed in this study suggested a need for continued inservice education with regard to certain components of developmentally appropriate practice. Motivation, evaluation and play have been targeted as the most significant focus for inservice education. Often teachers attend inservice designed for them while administrators attend inservice designed for administrators. Also, some inservice sessions are provided on the basis of available personnel and topics rather than emerging from the needs assessment and collaborative planning. This study provided for higher education faculty, administrators, teachers, and parents to plan inservice based on their needs assessment. "Creating a school management team of teachers, parents and other school personnel is often a first step" (Barbour & Seefeldt, p.31). As a result of these collaborative efforts, this method of inservice education will continue. Providing sound educational practices based on conclusive early childhood research is significant.

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